



Repairs Were “Too Costly”, People Died: Inhuman Result of a “Bottom-Line” System

“Buildings in the United States do not just fall down,” said the Mayor of Surfside, Florida. Not in this day and age.

But in Surfside, in Florida, in this country, in the year 2021, on June 24, in the very early hours of the day, a building did “just fall down.” And it buried in its rubble almost 200 people, only a few dozens of whom have been rescued as of June 27.

The almost automatic striving to reduce costs in every enterprise, a striving with which the whole, overriding capitalist system is imbued, led to this disaster, this loss of human life.

Workers in this country – not just in Florida, but throughout the country – know very well how this system works. They see it every day at their workplace. Engineering designs are skimped on. Corners are cut on standards. Materials are shoddy. And the people who do the work to build something – whether it be a building or a car – are pushed to put out too much work in too little time. Maintenance is incomplete – and after the fact, after something goes wrong. Inspections are often cursory – as was the one carried out by municipal authorities one day before the building fell, finding the building safe enough for continued human habitation. But even when an inspection is thorough – like the one carried out by an engineer three years before at Surfside – its calls for repairs “to ensure the safety of residents and the public” often are deferred to some later date because of cost. But deferral can be as bad as not doing anything at all.

In a system where the bottom line is the only one that matters, it costs too much money to repair something correctly. That system, where profit sets the rules, has a name. Its name is capitalism.

Every business in the country is infected by this same “bottom-line” mania, the capitalist mania to reduce spending in order to protect the profit margin. It matters not what the business is: a gigantic monopoly like Amazon or a family-run

management company, managing residential buildings for condominium associations. Whether or not they are organized to make profit, they all function within a profit-oriented system, and they are all constrained by the system’s inhumane logic.

The *Washington Post* reported that two nearby hotels, the Seven Seasons and the Residence Inn, pushed up their rates to \$800, even \$1500 a night, including for residents displaced from the collapsed building, or for family members seeking a place to stay while awaiting information on missing relatives. Every mean, despicable action finds its justification in this system’s profit-driven logic.

Press for more profit, violate safety, and bank on the odds – that’s the reasoning around which capitalism organizes itself. Usually, buildings don’t fall, cars don’t run out of control, bridges don’t collapse. But sometimes they do, sometimes it happens even in a condominium, in an area where prices run one million dollars or more.

As of early Sunday morning, the remains of seven people had been found. Another 154 were still unaccounted for.

How much more often does this kind of thing happen in ordinary working class residential areas? With safety ignored, people die, by twos and threes, in fires instead of collapses, day after day, instead of every 40 years. But the logic is the same.

This is a system that long ago proved itself incapable of making human life its priority. That’s even more true today, in this period when capitalism rushes from one crisis to the next, from one financial explosion to another – and from one human disaster to the next.

A system like this can’t be repaired. It has to be pulled up, rooted out, ground up, tossed aside, replaced by one that uses humanity as its standard. Hard to imagine how this can start – but the other option, to let capitalism continue, ever more destructive of human life, is impossible.

